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A LETTER

ON THE

SUBJECT OF THE VICE PRESIDENCY,

IN FAVOR OF THE

CLAIMS OF JAS. K. POLK, OF TENNESSEE,

TO THE NOMINATION OF THE

DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION.

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BY A TENNESSEAN.

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## LETTER.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE GLOBE.

WINCHESTER, (Tenn.) January 18, 1844.

SIR: I have observed in the *Globe* of the 8th instant, a communication over the signature of "AMICUS," on the subject of the vice-presidential nomination to be made by the democratic national convention at Baltimore in May next. I agree in opinion with the writer, "that the vice presidential candidate should be selected upon *principles*, and the *people should be the judge of these principles*; and that, before the selection is made." I agree with him that the selection should be the emanation of the popular voice of the democracy of the Union, and not the result of an arrangement to be made by a few politicians, without consulting that will. I am happy, also, to agree with the writer in another point; and that is, that "the democratic candidate for the next presidency is now ascertained; the people have indicated him; the convention will declare him; and he is as well known now as he will be after the convention adjourns." The popular voice of the democracy points, unerringly, to Mr. Van Buren as their candidate. He has ever been my first choice, and it is now certain that he will be the first choice of a large majority of the nation. I agree also with him, that "Mr. Van Buren being a democrat of the Jackson school, tried in the ten years' bank and federal war upon that hero and his policy; the vice-presidential candidate should be a statesman of the same principles, tested in the same crucible;" and that, as Mr. Van Buren resides in the northern section of the Union, the vice-presidential candidate should be a southern man, and "belong to that great interest (planting and slave-holding) which is now so vitally and perseveringly assailed." Agreeing also with "AMICUS" in the general principles which he lays down as proper to govern in the selection of a candidate, I differ with him widely in the practical application which he makes of them. In this difference, dictated by my best judgment, I am not sensible of being actuated in the least degree by any other wish or feeling than a sincere desire to promote the true interest and success of the democratic cause, by the most available means, in the great and trying contest which is now so near at hand. Our strongest man—one who can bring most strength to our ticket—should most assuredly be selected. The two distinguished gentlemen named by "AMICUS," as being more prominently before the country than others, to use his own words, "are Mr. William R. King, of Alabama, and Gov. Polk, of Tennessee; and the question is, which of them shall be taken?"

Without intending any the slightest disparagement to the public character or services of Mr.

King, or any other distinguished democrat, I think the proofs and evidences are most abundant to show that Mr. Polk has been more extensively and generally indicated, through the public press, and the voluntary action of the people in their popular assemblies, as the first choice of the democracy for the vice presidency, than any other man. His distinguished and conceded talents; his irreproachable public and private character; his indomitable courage and firmness in support of democratic principles under all circumstances; his personal energy and untiring industry; his unequalled labors and great sacrifices in the common cause,—have all conspired naturally to attract public attention to him as the most suitable, as well as the most available candidate. To these causes may, doubtless, be attributed the very numerous expressions of popular feeling and opinion in his favor, in so many States, and more especially in the South and Southwestern portions of the Union. In more than fifty popular meetings of the people of the several counties of his own State, held during the last autumn, he was declared by resolves to be the unanimous choice of the democracy of Tennessee. In no single meeting was any expression of opinion given in any form—not even in the form of an individual dissent—in favor of any other person. In all these meetings, with perhaps one or two exceptions, a *direct preference* was declared for Mr. Van Buren, as the prospective democratic candidate for the presidency. In popular meetings of the people in several counties in Alabama, (Mr. King's own State,) in numerous public meetings in Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, and Illinois, (not to mention many other strong indications of popular sentiment in other portions of the Union,) Gov. Polk has been declared to be the first choice of the democracy as a candidate for the vice presidency on a ticket with Mr. Van Buren. In the late State convention in Tennessee, he was unanimously nominated. In the State convention of Arkansas, in December last, Mr. Van Buren was nominated as a candidate for the presidency and Gov. Polk for the vice presidency.

Agreeing with "AMICUS" in the expression of the opinion that "it will never do for the vice presidency to be made an affair of *arrangement* in the convention, or by a few leading members of our party," the writer of this communication is fully satisfied, from the indications of popular sentiment already before the country, that Gov. Polk is the first choice of a large majority of the democracy of the nation, if left free from improper influences in making the selection; and that, if the popular current is left free and unchecked in its course, he will certainly be the nominee of the convention.

If I am right in this opinion, (of which I entertain no doubt,) I would respectfully submit for serious consideration whether it is not the most wise and safe course to *follow* the voluntary indications of the popular will and wishes of the party, than by entering into a struggle and contest between the rival friends of two or more of the distinguished aspirants of our party, and thereby attempt to *create, lead, and direct* public sentiment.

The manifestations referred to, favorable to the nomination of Gov. Polk, are not confined to the recently-expressed preferences of the democracy. They were given in various forms, entitling them to high consideration in many parts of the Union, previous to the meeting of the democratic national convention at Baltimore in May, 1840—now nearly four years ago. Before the meeting of that convention, he had received the nominations of the democratic State conventions of Virginia, Massachusetts, and Tennessee; and a decided preference had been declared for him in numerous primary meetings of the democracy in North Carolina and throughout the southern and southwestern States. The convention at Baltimore, however, having failed to make any nomination, he promptly, and with a self-sacrificing patriotism which has always marked his course, withdrew his name from the contest in a public letter, rather than suffer it to be made the means of producing any possible embarrassment or division in the democratic party. Being at that time governor of Tennessee, he contributed largely to the defence of Mr. Van Buren and the principles and measures of his administration, in the memorable contest of 1840; and, because he did so, vigorously, and without stint or regard to personal consequences, he became the object of the most unmeasured abuse and persecution of all the whig leaders and the whole whig press of Tennessee. Such was his reward for the most able and disinterested services rendered by any man of his party in his own State in that ever-memorable contest. It endeared him, however, to his own party at home and abroad, and is one of the many just causes of his present popularity with the great democratic family of the nation.

In the progress of this communication, "AMICUS" proceeds to assign the reasons why, in his opinion, a preference should be given to Mr. King over Gov. Polk. He thus proceeds:

"Equal in so many respects, and with merits so nearly balanced, what then is there to turn the scale between them? I answer, *seniority—length of service—more varied service—service in the war—Congress—service in a branch of the government which requires more information, and gives more experience—difference in the attitude of their respective friends towards Mr. Van Buren (the admitted democratic candidate for the presidency)—and in the political condition of their respective States.*"

To the first reason assigned, consisting of the mere fact that "Mr. King is the elder man," a ready answer is, that the single and mere fact of *seniority in years* should, in sober judgment, have but little to do in the selection of a proper candidate. Gov. Polk is not only of the age required by the constitution, but has reached his forty-eighth year, as may be seen by a sketch of his life in the Democratic Review. The second reason is, in my opinion, of no more weight than the first. It is, "Mr. King has seen longer service than Mr. Polk." This, in connexion with all the facts, can surely have no influence in making the selection of the candidate. Gov.

Polk has been in the public service more than twenty years, during fourteen of which he was a leading and distinguished representative in Congress, extensively known throughout the Union as having been a prominent member of that body, and successively, session after session, the able head of the Committee of Ways and Means during the bank-panic war upon Gen. Jackson and his administration, and then Speaker of the House—always one of the most honorable and important stations in the government—a post which he filled with distinguished ability for the four years immediately preceding his voluntary retirement from Congress. Mr. King has been longer in Congress; but has he filled posts involving so much responsibility, and requiring so rare a combination of talents, qualifications, and labor? In assigning the *third* reason, "AMICUS" says: "Mr. King's service has been more varied, for he has served in both Houses of Congress, while Mr. Polk has only served in one." The force of this reason is not perceived. If there be any in it, it might be very properly replied, that when Gov. Polk voluntarily relinquished his seat in Congress in 1839, at a time when there was not a whisper of opposition to his re-election in his district, and when the fact was well known that he would have been again returned to the House if he had desired it, he retired expressly for the purpose of making the patriotic effort, from which all others shrunk in dismay, to recover and redeem his State from the possession and ascendancy of whigery and federalism. By becoming a candidate for governor in that year, against the advice of many of his more cautious and timid friends, he embarked in the contest against a whig majority of twenty thousand, as indicated by the governor's and State election of 1837. By his indefatigable industry, toil, and commanding talents in popular discussion, he won, however, the most brilliant political victory ever achieved in any State of the Union. He was elected over the whig incumbent, Gov. Cannon, and filled the executive chair of Tennessee for two years. In his youth, he had served with great distinction as a member of the Tennessee legislature. His services, therefore, it seems to me, have been quite as *varied* and as distinguished as those of Mr. King. The fact, too, might be stated and maintained, (for it is true, and known to the writer of this communication,) that, after his election as governor of Tennessee, he had it at his option to be chosen a senator in the Congress of the United States by the legislature of Tennessee; but he voluntarily declined it, preferring to recall and reinstate his old friend and preceptor (the late Judge Grundy) in the station in the Senate from which that great and good man had been driven by the instructions of a federal whig legislature.

The fourth and fifth reasons of preference assigned by "AMICUS" are, that "Mr. King served in the war—Congress; and that, having been for many years a member of the Senate, he has 'served in a more responsible and complicated branch of the government than Mr. Polk.'" I confess myself unable to perceive the weight which the writer seems to attach to these reasons. Although Mr. King has occupied these stations, and been justly held in favorable estimation by those with whom he has been associated as a gentleman of worth, and although he may fully merit the eulogy which "AMICUS" has pronounced upon his character, yet it is most true that he is, comparatively, but little known to the great body of the American people. The character of his public services has not been such as to attract public



attention, and leave any lasting impression on the public mind. Without any detraction from Mr. King's merits, the precise reverse of the foregoing remarks may be truly affirmed of the character and effects of the public services of Gov. Polk. Though he was not old enough to hold a seat in Congress during the last war with England, and although he has never held a seat in the Senate of the United States, yet the important character of his public services in Congress, and as the chief magistrate of his own State, have been such as to make him both extensively and favorably known to nearly all the leading public men of the nation; and, also, to the great mass of the American people throughout the Union. He has been a man of the people, and emphatically one of them. He has ever mingled freely with his fellow-citizens; his feelings, sympathies, and interests have ever been in common with the great body of his countrymen; while, upon the true principles of the great doctrine of utility, he has been their watchful public servant. Mr. King has confined his labors more to the closet and council chamber. Hence, in their very habits consists one of the striking dissimilarities of their public characters.

The sixth ground of preference assigned is, "the attitude of their respective friends towards Mr. Van Buren." The late Alabama State convention nominated Mr. Van Buren, and the State convention of Tennessee made no nomination for the presidency. "AMERICA" has by no means been correctly informed of the true state of public opinion of the democracy of Tennessee, and has, therefore, imbibed an erroneous impression. Although no formal nomination of a candidate for the presidency was made by the Tennessee convention, yet the fact is well known—is as notorious as that the convention met in November in that State—that, in the numerous primary meetings of the people by whom the delegates to the convention were appointed, resolutions approving Mr. Van Buren's administration, and expressive of a strong and decided preference for him as the next democratic candidate, were passed, and passed, in almost every instance, by acclamation. A large majority of the convention were known to entertain the same opinions and wishes; and that, if an expression of preference for any candidate had been deemed of the least importance to secure Mr. Van Buren's nomination at Baltimore, it would have been expressed with almost perfect unanimity. As, however, in all numerous bodies of men, called together to deliberate upon any subject, however plain, there will ever be a few dissentients from the majority, the convention, in order to secure entire unanimity in the State, and perfect harmony in its proceedings, in a proper spirit of forbearance and concession to the minority, abstained from giving expression to their preference. All were agreed in one thing, the most essential point in question; and that was, to support in good faith the nominee of the national convention. That Mr. Van Buren would be the nominee, the convention had not the slightest doubt. By the course adopted, all, even the slightest division in the party in the State, in advance of the action of the national convention, was prudently avoided. The delegates chosen to represent the State in the convention at Baltimore, profess a full knowledge of the sentiments of the democracy of their respective districts and sections of the State. That sentiment is known to be favorable to Mr. Van Buren's nomination. The delegates are not instructed; but no doubt can exist of their will and wish to faithfully

represent their constituents. This sixth reason, therefore, why Mr. King should be preferred to Gov. Polk, when tested by the truth of the real state of public sentiment in Tennessee, must necessarily fall to the ground as possessing no weight in itself. This, as well as the seventh reason assigned for the preference of Mr. King—that is to say: "the political condition of their respective States"—does Gov. Polk great and manifest injustice; and will, I am well persuaded, be found to operate, when rightly tested, most unfortunately for the claims of the writer's favorite candidate. No man in the Union has been more consistently, uniformly, and zealously the supporter of Mr. Van Buren and his political principles, than Governor Polk and his friends in Tennessee always have been. Indeed, it is a confessed truth in that State, that if it had not been for the exertions and advocacy of Gov. Polk, and a few other leading men, there would scarcely heretofore, at any time, have been a Van Buren party in Tennessee. If, when a large majority of the delegation in Congress from that State, with John Bell, then Speaker of the House, at their head, met together in the caucus at Washington, in the winter of 1834-5, commonly called the "caucus of eleven," and contrived and attempted to carry out the wicked design of dividing and conquering the democratic party of the Union, by putting up and running the late Judge White for the presidency, against Mr. Van Buren, when they clearly foresaw and knew that the latter would be the choice of an overwhelming majority of the party;—I repeat, that if, at that critical moment, Gov. Polk, Cave Johnson, and the Felix Grundy had yielded to the wishes of the members of the caucus, and had united with them in the plot, where now would have been the democratic party, not only in Tennessee, but in all the southwestern States? Where now would have been the Van Buren party in those States? In answer to these interrogatories, it may be most confidently affirmed, that if it had not been for the steadfast and unshaken integrity of the gentleman named, on that trying occasion, that the democracy at this day would have been in a hopeless and irrecoverable minority in the States referred to. Judge White had, at that time, an almost boundless popularity in his own State and the Southwest. He had been the professed friend of General Jackson and his administration; his ultimate political defection was not anticipated but by few persons, the ulterior designs of himself and the members of the caucus having been artfully concealed. At this juncture, at the imminent hazard of incurring the displeasure of his constituents, and losing his seat in Congress, Gov. Polk remained steadfast and immovable. He returned home from Washington, and breasted the political storm, which had been artfully and successfully raised in favor of Judge White. Polk, Grundy, and Johnson were the foremost of the few men in the State who took bold and open ground in exposing the plot, endeavoring to arrest its effects, and in the support of Mr. Van Buren. Grundy and Johnson both fell temporarily in the struggle. The former was *instructed out* of the United States Senate by a whig legislature, and the latter was *defeated* for Congress in his district. Gov. Polk was alone left standing. He was so well fortified in the affections and confidence of his immediate constituents—satisfied them so fully of the correctness of his course, that he was again returned to Congress; and at this day, the people of that district constitute a sound democratic portion of the State.

In 1839, as already stated, he recovered the State, when any other man, of less energy and forecast, would have been deterred from the undertaking by the apparent insurmountable difficulties by which it seemed to be surrounded. He was elected governor; a democratic legislature, in both branches, was returned; Mr. Grundy was restored to his seat in the Senate; and Mr. Cave Johnson was again elected to Congress over his former successful competitor. This great democratic victory was achieved by a close vote. To these events, the political storm of 1840 succeeded, which swept before it so many States, (Tennessee among the number,) and the democratic party of the Union was, for a time, overthrown. Under the influence of the mighty effects of this national disaster, Gov. Polk again entered the canvass for re-election in the general State election of 1841, with a majority of more than *twelve thousand* votes against him, as indicated by the presidential election of the preceding autumn. His entry into this unequal canvass seemed to be against hope—the excitement of the preceding year having by no means subsided. Nothing dismayed, he again canvassed the whole State—addressed the people in strains of argument, reason, and eloquence, which had the powerful effect, though it did not secure his re-election, of reducing the whig majority of 1840 about *nine thousand* votes—his defeat being only by a majority for his competitor of a fraction over *three thousand* votes. Again, in 1843, although he had already performed a greater sum of labor, and submitted to more personal sacrifices and privations, than perhaps any other man in the Union had ever done under like circumstances in the services of his party and political friends, he cheerfully yielded to the united wishes of the democracy of his State, and again became their candidate for governor. He took the field and opened the canvass in March, and continued it actively, travelling throughout all the counties in the State, and making speeches almost daily from that time until the election in August. The immense amount of labor, thus performed, may be estimated from the fact that Tennessee is over six hundred miles in length, over one hundred miles wide, and contains over seventy counties. In this election, although his aggregate vote exceeded *fifty-four thousand*—a larger number than the democratic party had ever before polled in the State—his federal whig competitor succeeded by the small majority of between three and four thousand, in a poll in which upwards of *one hundred and twelve thousand* votes were cast. In Tennessee it is well understood and known, that this result did not truly indicate the true state of popular sentiment upon the leading questions of controverted national policy. It is a fact, notorious in that State, that the federal whig party labored constantly in the contest, and with undeserved success, to make new, local, and temporary issues of a State character; and in many counties and districts, they secured by these means, and by similar acts of deception, more than votes enough to have changed the general result if the voters had not been so misled. These local questions, and the causes of them, are now happily at an end, and in the approaching presidential contest cannot be raised or rendered available for the federal party, as tests upon which votes can be made to depend. My opinion is, most clearly and decidedly, that a considerable majority of all the voters of Tennessee are democratic; and that, with Gov. Polk's name on a ticket with Mr. Van Buren, the State can be certainly carried for the democracy next fall. It

is under the state of facts which I have here hastily narrated, that "Amicus" does Gov. Polk and his friends glaring injustice, as I sincerely believe, when he indulges in the following language:

"Finally, the political condition of their respective States is another point of preference for Mr. King. Alabama is democratic; Tennessee is federal whig. One is helping, the other is injuring, the democratic cause. The red-hot shot of Tennessee are now fired into the democratic ship. This may be a misfortune, and not the fault of that former democratic State, and her present public men. Still, it is a misfortune which entails a consequence, and which involves a serious consideration in the selection of a vice-presidential candidate. We have a desperate conflict ahead—one in which a new and portentous power appears in the federal ranks—a foreign interference from British capitalists, seeking the assumption of two hundred millions of State debts; which power, added to all the others which march under the federal flag, give to the contest of 1844 a fearful aspect. In such a contest the democracy has no compliments to spare to unfortunate States by carrying the burden of the public men who cannot bring their own State into the democratic line. They want strength, not weakness."

The writer of this paragraph did not, perhaps, well consider its general and unqualified scope and bearing. He did not, perhaps, for the moment, remember that General Jackson himself was a citizen of Tennessee, and took an active interest in the contest of 1840, as he also did in those of 1841 and 1843. He did not perhaps remember that the time-honored patriot and sage, to save his country, and to preserve the democratic character of her institutions, in 1840, in company with Mr. Grundy and Gov. Polk, visited a portion of the State, distant from his residence, and actually addressed a large assembly of his fellow-citizens on the occasion. Yet "Amicus" affects to think that, in such a contest as that which is impending, "the democracy has no compliments to spare to unfortunate States by carrying the burden of the public men who cannot bring their own State into the democratic line. They want strength, not weakness."

While Gov. Polk has, for years past, been struggling with a giant's strength, with a host of adversaries, including a most embittered and unscrupulous federal whig party, it may be truly said, in the language of "Amicus," that "without invidious comparisons, and without reference to personal merits—looking only to the accidents of their lives and positions," Mr. King has been placed in circumstances of ease, not requiring an effort on his part to preserve the democratic principles in the democratic State of Alabama. The democratic majority in that State has ever been large, certain, and fixed. No struggle on his part, such as has been demanded of Gov. Polk in Tennessee, has ever been required or deemed necessary. While Mr. King has enjoyed perfect political quiet and ease, and been gently wafted on his course with the popular current upon a smooth sea,—while this has been Mr. King's happy lot, Gov. Polk has encountered persecution and breakers on every hand. If, from "the accidents of their lives and positions," this has been the case, can it, in candor, be assigned as a valid reason for abandoning Gov. Polk, at a moment when the whole democracy of his State confidently believe that, with his name on Mr. Van Buren's ticket, Tennessee—the home of Jackson—can and will be redeemed from her present false and



unnatural political position? In Alabama there is no danger. She will be soundly democratic with any respectable name on the ticket with Mr. Van Buren. Tennessee is debatable ground. In Tennessee, the contest is to be fierce and excited: if her electoral vote is secured, a great prize will be gained. With Gov. Polk's name on the ticket, the whole democracy of the State feel confident of success. With any other name as the candidate for the vice presidency, she may, and most probably will be lost. The very same reason, therefore, thus assigned by "Amicus" against the nomination of Gov. Polk by the Baltimore convention, is, in my judgment, a strong and unanswerable argument and reason, among many others, why he should be preferred.

Gov. Polk has never been an ambitious man; so that "Amicus," I have no doubt, does no more than bare justice to both gentlemen in declaring that "neither of them has ever been greedy after federal office. Neither of them has ever been known to wish a federal office." So far as regards Gov. Polk, the remark well known by all his friends to be strictly true, is Had he ever desired federal office, his intimate connexion with the administrations of Gen. Jackson and Mr. Van Buren, surely afforded ample opportunities for the gratification of his wishes. He never has had such wishes to gratify, but has been content, throughout his brilliant career, to perform hard and severe service, and submit to every degree of sacrifice in support of his party and principles, while others who have enjoyed the alternations of shade and sunshine, as suited their pleasure, have been rewarded with public honors. After more than twenty years of public service, such as I have described, Gov. Polk's name has been placed before the democracy of the nation by his friends, without any solicitation or agency on his part, as a suitable and proper candidate for the vice-presidential nomination. His name will be continued before the party by his political friends until the nomination shall be made by the national convention. It will be so continued before the party, because his friends in the South and Southwestern States believe, that his nomination will bring more substantial and available strength to the democratic ticket than that of any other distinguished citizen who has or may be named for the vice-presidential office.

Gov. Polk has never offended against the spirit or principles of true democracy. He zealously embraced the true republican principles of Thomas Jefferson, at his outset in life, and has cherished and defended them from his youth up. He has ever been firm, undeviating and unshaken in the main-

tainance of these principles as well as in the seasons of adversity, as in the seasons of the prosperity of his party, both in and out of his State. The democracy of Tennessee, who have been familiar with his public and private character for more than a quarter of a century, possess a full and perfect knowledge of his patriotism and constancy of character, and of his pure and incorruptible integrity in public and private life. They well know and appreciate the unparalleled privations, toils and labors he has cheerfully undergone, and the free sacrifices of all private and personal interests which he has heretofore made in the cause of democracy. It is upon these grounds, and because they fully believe him to be the most available man in the Southwestern States, that his friends, without disparagement of the claims of other distinguished members of the democratic party, have presented his name to their democratic brethren of the union, as being eminently qualified, as well as the most available candidate, to fill the second office in the national government.

Had it not been for the publication of the communication signed "Amicus," in your paper of the 8th of January, I should not have drawn on the indulgence and liberality of your columns on the present occasion. With "Amicus," I can truly say, that "personally the two gentlemen are equally acceptable to me."

I have freely expressed my preference for Gov. Polk, for the reasons candidly and explicitly assigned; and because the personal claims of neither of the gentlemen ought to control, in the least degree, the paramount interest which the democratic party have in making a proper decision in the selection which the convention at Baltimore may make. Having no possible unkind feeling towards Mr. King, I have carefully abstained from all discussion which might receive an invidious construction, of the relative qualifications of the distinguished citizens whose fitness for the vice presidency I have had under review.

Since the foregoing was written, I have received information, deemed reliable, of the nomination of Mr. Van Buren for the presidency, and Gov. Polk for the vice presidency, by the State convention of Mississippi, on the same day of the date of the Globe containing the communication of "Amicus;" and of a large popular movement in favor of Gov. Polk by the democracy of Cincinnati, Ohio. These popular movements all serve to confirm the grounds of preference which I have assumed for Gov. Polk in the foregoing communication.

A TENNESSEAN.

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